

Research and teaching staff in developing countries rate the value of libraries higher than in the West

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Nell McCreadie elaborates on the findings from a recent study on the exploring the value of academic libraries in developing countries. Case studies indicated that there is a clear need for better promotion of resources, awareness raising and skills development. However, this is not just a case of internal promotion, but also a case of developing external relationships with the scholarly community to promote advocacy for the library.



A common concern that our global library partners often raise with us is that the role of the academic library in supporting teaching and research staff is not fully understood. Too often, library patrons fail to fully understand the origins of the resources that they are using and how they are able to access them. A new [study released by SAGE](#) tells a similar story, with librarians in the developing world becoming increasingly aware of the need to communicate the value of their academic libraries. The study explored opinions of both the library and academic teaching and research community to understand how the library is perceived.

One finding of the study is that most evaluation of value is based on what is in the library's resource collection. There are few external drivers to demonstrate quality or value; unlike in the UK where National Student Survey scores are just one ways libraries are being evaluated. The case studies illustrated that developing country libraries recognize the importance of evaluating the level of support and service that they provide. As one librarian pointed out, having access to the range of high-quality material is not enough. In order to demonstrate and affect the library's value for stakeholders, the behaviour and perceptions of faculty need to be changed, "it is a process of reinvention in order to reinforce support for faculty in their teaching and research roles".



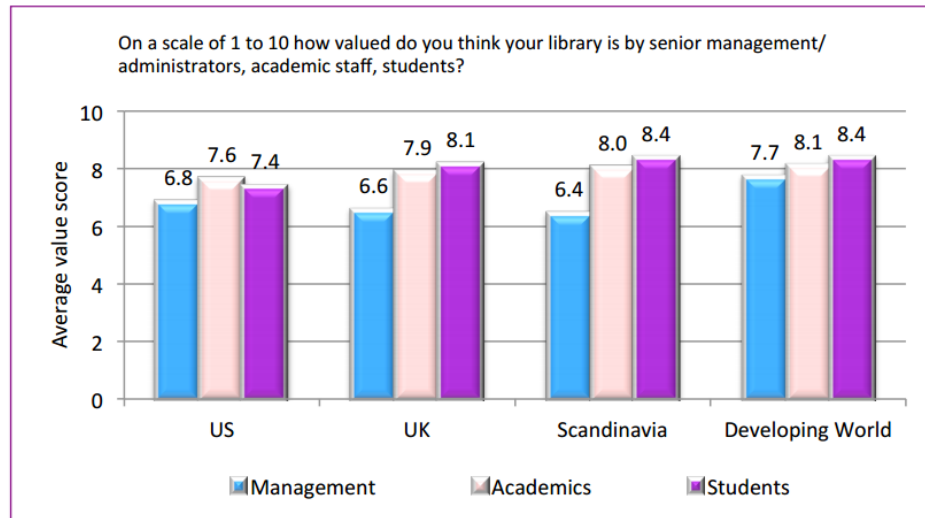
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Citing developing research partnerships, integrated teaching, research services and literacy instruction as part of the 'reinvented' librarian role, the study highlighted a number of areas where librarians are beginning to actively engage with faculty, exploring additional services to offer their faculty patrons.

Some librarians have moved further in this. The University of Maseno, Kenya and National Technical University, Ukraine, have developed integrated teaching practices, supporting both the development of digital media literacy skills amongst students and introducing training around electronic resource collections to ensure that information skills are embedded from the start. Yet, although perceived well by faculty, librarians noted that there is a lack of "cohesive offerings in librarian services in addition to traditional roles of collection development and information skills."

Asked about the biggest challenge to demonstrating library value and gaining support one librarian remarked: "faculty don't take it upon themselves to communicate what they want from the library. We try to engage them, but they are not forthcoming." The study highlighted areas of disconnect between the librarians and their faculty, most notably between what librarians see as important means of communication, and communication that faculty report as being effective — be this communication of services or the awareness of the physical and online presence of the library.

Fig. 1: Librarians' perception of value



NB: 'management' was open to interpretation of campus management or university personnel

For librarians to understand the perceptions of faculty and students and to know how to work collaboratively and influence them, effective marketing is required. Case studies indicated that there is clear need for better promotion of resources, awareness raising and skills development. However, this is not just a case of internal promotion, but also a case of developing external relationships with the scholarly community to promote advocacy for the library.

Librarians recognize the need for investing in the marketing of the library as a whole. However the reality of constraints on human, material and financial resources and time mean that librarians need to be smart in identifying ways of building relationships at a senior level and offering additional services to promote their value, which are both effective and scalable.

Demonstrating value for institutional stakeholders has become an increasingly important activity in academic libraries around the world. The concept of library value can be defined in several ways: value for users in the level of support and services provided; value for the parent institution in contribution to institutional missions and goals; or economic value for return on investment.

The full report can be downloaded for free [here](#). We undertook this project as an extension of the LISU study to better understand how libraries can better support teaching and research staff in developing countries, and what publishers can do to aid this collaboration. We would welcome further input. Join the conversation at #libvalue

Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the Impact of Social Science blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please review our [Comments Policy](#) if you have any concerns on posting a comment below.

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